

Norton Wants Full Review of Mall Lighting to Address Potential Havens for Criminals- December 2006

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Address Potential Havens for Criminals

December 20, 2006

Washington, DC-The Office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today released Norton's letter to National Park Service (NPS) Director Mary Bomar, seeking a comprehensive inventory and definitive information about lighting on the National Mall, following a recent published report pointing out that there are still deficiencies on the Mall. Norton wrote in the letter, "Poor lighting was undoubtedly a direct contribution to the assaults of last summer on the Mall." She asked that before the Spring 2007 cherry blossom season, the NPS conduct an inventory of all lighting on the National Mall, including the cross streets, address any outages, and trim branches that often block lighting. Norton said, "It is unclear if the Mall between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial is, as yet, sufficiently lighted to be welcoming to residents and tourists, and to deter crime."

Norton thanked Director Bomar for new temporary lighting between the Lincoln Memorial and World War II Memorial installed after Norton raised several concerns about lighting after the assaults. The Congresswoman inspected the area and found that the walkways on either side were unlighted and a potential haven for criminals. A December 6, 2006 editorial in The Washington Post underscored continuing lighting problems on the entire Mall, including an overlap of NPS and D.C. Department of Transportation jurisdiction, and an absence of procedure for figuring out what agency is responsible for the lighting.

Norton also asked for information concerning the system for replacing bulbs in areas under NPS jurisdiction which overlap with the D.C. Department of Transportation. Norton kept the Park Police patrolling crime hot spots in D.C. parks like Anacostia, Rock Creek and Fort Dupont Parks, by convincing the Capitol Police to patrol parts of the Mall last summer.

The full text of Norton's letter follows.

December 20, 2006

Ms. Mary Bomar
Director
National Park Service
Washington, DC

Dear Ms. Bomar,

As you know, poor lighting was undoubtedly a direct contribution to the assaults of last summer on the Mall. I appreciate the efforts of the National Park Service (NPS) in addressing several issues of poor lighting that I raised then, particularly the new temporary lights that have now been placed between the Lincoln Memorial and the World War II Memorial. The two broad walkways between these popular memorials were pitch black and a potentially dangerous haven for criminals.

However, as a recent Washington Post editorial pointed out, there are now additional concerns regarding the lights lining Fourth Street between Madison and Jefferson Drives, which apparently have been out for some time. This new area underscores continuing lighting deficiencies on the National Mall. It is unclear if the Mall between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial is, as yet, sufficiently lighted to be welcoming to residents and tourists, and to deter crime.

I ask that before the Spring 2007 cherry blossom season the NPS conduct an inventory of all lighting on the National Mall, including the Jefferson Memorial and East Potomac Park, as well as the cross streets, address any outages within your jurisdictions and trim branches that often block lighting. Even when this is done, the Mall clearly needs additional lighting beyond what is now provided to assure the safety of visitors. Moreover, last summer, there was no system in place for reporting bulb outages and assuring their prompt replacement. Please let me know whether such a system has been developed and how it operates.

The Fourth Street lighting problem, in particular, has revealed the absence of procedures when jurisdictions between NPS and the District Department of Transportation may overlap. Please inform me whether you have now established a standard operating procedure throughout the city to maximize the safety of the millions of residents, federal employees, and visitors. I know you will agree that post 9-11 conditions in the nation's capital do not allow for guesswork on vital lighting issues.

Thank you again for the attention you have given to lighting issues so far. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Holmes Norton